

Venerable Aggamahapandita Walpola Rahula

Mahathera - An appreciation

Bhikkhu Dhammavihari

The international world of Buddhist scholarship has lost a keen student of remarkable stature. In his day, he was an awe-inspiring courageous professor of the subject. In the field of Buddhist studies, he was admittedly our senior, having passed out of the University College of early forties with his B.A. the year we entered it as undergraduates. Whether it be about the teachings of Buddhism or about Buddhist history, he had a disarming candour and was forthright in whatever he said. Many scholars of the day, at times, rightly disagreed with him. But that mattered very little to him. But we also knew he had an honesty with which he subsequently revised his original bold utterances, if and when necessary.

His doctoral thesis of that early era on History of Buddhism in Ceylon is a wonderful collection of valuable data. But with his indomitable spirit and his pioneering enthusiasm, he plunges into many areas of argument with which we would disagree even today. But our arguments and counter-arguments on these left no bitterness in the mouth, neither his nor ours. He was a gentleman, a magnanimous one at that.

It gives me great joy to recollect that throughout my university career, both in Sri Lanka and abroad, I did unhesitatingly recommend to new entrants to courses on Buddhism, the venerable theravada's *What The Buddha Taught*. It is virtually the Tao of Buddhism. We are constantly assured that we were right in doing so. Translated into many world languages today, it shall remain unsurpassed for all times.

It must also be mentioned in passing that he was as much an unsurpassable

scholar of Buddhist Sanskrit literature. As a casual student, I had the privilege of sitting with him as he was pursuing his Buddhist Sanskrit studies at the Sorbonne under the eminent French scholar, Paul Demieville. I know in what high esteem Professor Demieville held him. In this field, the venerable thera has many publications to his credit.

We are sad we have lost a brilliant friend with a dynamism of his own. But he was a trailblazer and we are confident we shall continue to benefit from his guidance.